

Washington, D.C. - Congresswoman Melissa Bean blasted Canadian National Railway (CN) after an audit released today by the Surface Transportation Board that documented severe blockage of road crossings CN expansion and a failure by CN to disclose this information to regulators.

"This audit shows CN's blatant disregard for our laws and callous indifference to our communities," Bean said. "Our warnings about CN's impact on local traffic congestion are proving true, while CN's promises about working in good faith to mitigate the consequences are proving false."

In January, newly confirmed STB Chairman Daniel Elliot ordered an independent audit of CN's self-submitted reports to the STB in response to repeated complaints from effected communities about the reports' validity. CN plans to increase rail traffic by 400 to 900 percent along the EJ&E line, which cuts through many suburban Chicago communities. The audit results, released today, found "a major discrepancy in CN's reporting" regarding blocked crossings, Elliot said in a letter to Congress.

"In November and December 2009, CN reported a total of 14 blocked crossings for longer than ten minutes," Elliot's letter said. "Our auditors revealed over 1,400 occurrences of crossings being blocked for longer than ten minutes for the same two-month period. It appears that CN's monthly reports only include occurrences of blocked crossings for longer than ten minutes when the train had completely stopped, whereas the data from the audit includes not only stopped, but also slow moving trains or other causes."

In response, the STB has explicitly ordered CN to accurately report all blocked crossing data and summoned the company to an STB hearing for April 28, 2010.

"Safety is our top priority, particularly following another tragic death along the CN line," Bean said. "How can our communities trust CN's commitment to safety when they have chosen to sue our government to avoid minimal mitigations and supply inaccurate data on blocked crossings?"

The STB approved CN's expansion plans on December 24, 2008. Bean and a bi-partisan coalition of suburban Illinois members, along with local leaders, opposed the acquisition due to significant threats to communities' first-responder capabilities, traffic congestion, environment and quality of life. At Bean's request, several national officials have visited the area to examine the crossing and meet with local officials to discuss the issue, including Elliot, Federal Railroad

Administrator Joseph Szabo, House Transportation Committee Chairman James Oberstar, and U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood.

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